

Desarrollo interlingüístico en la formación del profesional de la carrera pedagógica de Lenguas Extranjeras Inglés

Focusing on interlinguistic development in preservice English language teacher-training at pedagogical universities

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Resumen

El objetivo del artículo fue concientizar a los docentes que trabajan en la formación de profesores de lengua(s) extranjeras sobre el seguimiento al desarrollo interlingüístico de los estudiantes de la carrera, en cuanto a capacidades metalingüísticas e interlingüísticas que tienen que formar para su futuro desempeño pedagógico y didáctico. Los autores, de manera breve, sistematizaron el papel del análisis contrastivo y el análisis de errores, identificando las insatisfacciones de muchos especialistas sobre estos enfoques. Por consiguiente, se enfatizó en la necesidad de emplear una teoría más integradora que dé una visión amplia del sistema que construye cada estudiante, la interlengua y su análisis sistemático. Se emplearon métodos teóricos

Abstract

The objective of this article is to raise teacher trainers' concern for the nature of interlinguistic development in trainees, in relation to the metalinguistic and interlinguistic capacities they have to form for their future pedagogical performance as foreign language teachers. The authors briefly reviewed the roles of contrastive analysis and error analysis and some of the partial dissatisfactions of many practitioners with these theories; therefore, they remarked the need for one which offers a wider view of learners' developing system, the interlanguage (IL) and its systematic analysis. Theoretical and empirical methods were used, a cross-sectional study was carried out from which sample utterances of IL analysis were presented to determine the

y empíricos, se realizó un estudio transversal del cual se presentó una muestra para determinar la fuente del error, su tipo y posibles causas, y así poder planificar las tareas de remediación más adecuadas. Como conclusiones parciales de la investigación se realizó la propuesta de algunos procedimientos metodológicos para contribuir a un desarrollo interlingüístico más eficiente de los estudiantes en formación de la carrera de Lenguas Extranjeras, Inglés.

error sources in teachers of English in preparation, type of error and possible causes, in order to plan appropriate teaching and remediation tasks. As partial conclusions of the investigation a group of methodological procedures were proposed to contribute to a more efficient interlinguistic development of students in the pre-service English language teacher training course.

Palabras clave: lengua extranjera, inglés, formación del profesional, lingüística, interlingüística, metalingüística

Key words: foreign language, English, teacher training, linguistics, interlinguistic, metalinguistic

Introduction

Foreign language teaching has a long history of research. The studies in this field started with the influence of Linguistics and Psychology and have extended to such disciplines as Sociology, Education and Neurosciences. In spite of the progress in this long *promenade*, one could say that the foreign language teaching community is still far from a complete picture of the language learning process.

Through a historical review of the theoretical foundation, one can notice that the studies have extended their original object of investigation; i.e., they now comprise not only the descriptions of the complexities of language, --as in an earlier stage-- but they focus the learner and the processes involved in learning. Therein, contrastive analysis theory and error analysis resulted insufficient to language teaching practitioners; thus in the last decade one can observe a tendency towards research on learners' interlanguage (interlanguage analysis). This type of analysis brings to light a clearer and wider understanding of the process in which the learner has a prominent role.

The fact that learners construct a system of their own is a general fact about foreign language learning subjects, but in the case of foreign language teacher trainees, it is of particular

interest and concern, for it is a language teacher who is being formed. That is, they require language awareness and understanding on how the process takes place for assuming responsibility for their own learning and for transmitting those experiences in teaching others. Therefore, this article is concerned with the training of teachers of English in preparation in the following direction: procedures for shaping their linguistic and communicative competence and the understanding of the English language complexities which require special didactic treatment in the teaching-learning process. The article has the objective of discussing the need to form metalinguistic and interlinguistic capacities in teachers in preparation and to provide teacher trainers with some procedures to contribute to the achievement of this condition.

Material and methods

The use of theoretical methods such as analysis-synthesis and induction-deduction allowed the systematization of some important elements on interlanguage development and the modelling of some practical implications for teacher training. The employment of empirical methods, such as a cross-sectional study of students' interlanguage, the revision of documents (trainees' lesson plans and written exams), the observation of lesson presentations and discussions by trainees; in fact, the author's frequent contact with in-service English teachers and pre-service trainees has made it possible to observe and notice some linguistic and methodological limitations: on the one hand, lack of accuracy in the use of some language-specific forms (morphological aspects, syntactic patterns and the appropriate use of lexical items); and on the other hand, a weak methodological focus on interlinguistic aspects for anticipating and dealing with learning problems in their pupils (predictions of probabilistic negative transfer and learning complexities). These observations and the theoretical analysis on this area of knowledge led the authors to reflect on the issue and propose some methodological procedures to strengthen the interlinguistic development teachers in preparation need for their professional-pedagogical performance.

A cross-sectional study of learners' IL was carried out, which consisted of data collected from a group of subjects at a single point in time. It focused specific language aspects the teacher wanted to analyse, and pre-specified tasks were designed to elicit the production of the particular target language item(s). These data-elicitation techniques included interviews, and

planned conversations through monologues. The context for data collection was the classroom in oral performance tasks.

Results and discussion

The roles of contrastive analysis and error analysis

The role of the native language has since long ago been considered significant by language teaching practitioners. Lado (1957), stated “[...] individuals tend to transfer the forms and meanings, and the distribution of forms and meanings of their native language and culture to the foreign language and culture”¹. Regarding the causes of errors there have been different theories such as contrastive analysis, error analysis and more recently the interlanguage theory and its analysis. The emergence of one theory obeys to partial dissatisfaction with the previous one. These conceptions have been systematically treated by Larry Selinker since the 1970s². Gass and Selinker (2008) offer a historical overview of this process.³

Contrastive analysis was based on the comparison of languages to determine potential errors for the ultimate purpose of isolating what needs to be learned. In other words, the ultimate goal is to predict areas that will be difficult or easy for learners. However, according to studies discussed by Selinker and Gass, *not only did errors occurred that had not been predicted by theory, but there was also evidence that some predicted errors did not occur.*⁴

Errors can provide evidence of the state of a learner’s knowledge of the foreign language. *“They are not to be viewed solely as a product of imperfect learning. Rather, they are to be viewed as indications of a learner’s attempt to figure out some system, that is, to impose regularity on the language the learner is exposed to [...]”*⁵ Therefore, from the perspective of a learner who has created a grammatical system (IL) everything that forms part of that system fits there. Hence, errors are only errors with reference to the Target Language.

Error analysis provides a broader range of possible explanations than contrastive analysis for teachers to account for errors, and there are two main error types within that framework:

¹ Lado, Robert. *Linguistics across cultures: applied linguistics for language teachers*, p. 2.

² Larry Selinker coined two terms in the 1970s which are fundamental to the field: interlanguage, to describe the learner's developing L2 competence, and fossilization, to refer to the end of that process of development. Later work involved the discourse domain hypothesis (with Dan Douglas) according to which second language development occurs not homogeneously but in relation to idiosyncratic topics of expertise. Selinker also co-authored an influential introduction to SLA with Susan Gass. [Note of the Editor]

³ Gass, Susan M. and Larry Selinker. *Second Language Acquisition: an introductory course*, p. 89-102.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 98.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 102.

interlingual and intralingual. Although, one could question the validity of this classification of ‘intralingual error’; considering what was previously expressed about the learner’s created grammatical system as an individual system, it could be said that the conflict is not within that system but between that system and that of the target language. Therefore, the question to pose could be: may intralingual errors be considered as interlinguistic phenomena as errors occur between the learner’s created system and the target language system?

The previously referred authors state that *one of the major criticisms of error analysis was directed at its total reliance on errors and the exclusion of other information. [...] one needs to consider non-errors as well as errors to get the entire picture of a learner’s linguistic behaviour.*⁶ A second difficulty with error analysis is the determination of what an error is an error of. In sum, error analysis *per se* cannot provide us with full information, because an assumption of error analysis is that correct usage is equivalent to correct rule formation. But it only sees a partial picture of what a learner produces of the foreign language; i.e., a learner may use a rule correctly in one context and incorrectly in another.

Interlanguage analysis theory

Since learners’ production may be influenced simultaneously and *in extenso* by multiple sources, it is convenient to integrate the different theoretical views about the learners developing system. It is clear that there are other factors that affect foreign language learning; these factors may be innate principles of language, attitude towards learning, motivation and aptitude. Considering the previously mentioned limitations of CA and EA, the latest tendency has been the research based on the study of the learners’ interlanguage. As stated by Gass and Selinker “*learners do not have a uniform starting point, their utterances vary in degree of syntactic sophistication and their interlanguages are unique creations.*”⁷

The theory of interlanguage has been systematically studied by different authors in the last two decades: Selinker (1990s); Gass and Selinker (2008); Fernández (2006); Cenoz, Hufeisen and Jessner (2003), among others. Interlanguage development may be referred to as the different stages learners go through in the process of approaching the foreign language system. Interlanguage has an individual nature, so every individual student gradually constructs their interlanguage. It has a non-linear, variable and a temporary

⁶ Gass, Susan M. and Larry Selinker. *Second Language Acquisition: an introductory course*, p.104.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 73.

character as the student goes through different stages of development. It shares characteristics from both the mother tongue and the target language and in particular cases, a third language.

Research on interlanguage development is usually based on longitudinal studies or cross-sectional studies.⁸ Samples of these studies are offered by many practitioners, like White (s. a.); Ayoun (2000); Lindström (2003); Tello (2006); and Wenting (2009). Despite the complexity of this process of data collection, identification of errors, classification, determination of sources and remediation, the study of interlanguage development reveals crucial information for language teachers as well as for learners. It must be a systematic practice of foreign language teachers.

Observations derived from interlanguage analysis

A review of research experiments described in the revised literature, and the authors' analysis of collected output data from students in different levels or school years of the pedagogical major led to the synthesis of the following observations:

- . Learner interlanguage production may be influenced simultaneously by two different sources (the mother tongue and the target language)
- . There are interlanguage phenomena that do not have their origin in either the native language or the target language (confusions, avoidance, communication strategies, and simplification). Learners tend to avoid complex and specific forms of the target language.
- . Learners impose structure on the available linguistic data and formulate their own internalized system (known as interlanguage). That is, they build up utterances with the available linguistic resources they have in their repertoire.
- . Learners reach generalizations that justify their deviant language forms and rules (known as interlanguage hypotheses). Then they produce utterances and expect to get evidence of whether their production is right or wrong. This allows restructuring the created system.

This analysis gives the teacher the possibility to determine difficult and easy areas which provide a view of what needs to be learned and what does not need to be especially treated in the learning process. Also, he/she can know what difficulties to remediate. There are deviations that obey to simplification or to overgeneralization of some target language forms.

⁸ Gass, Susan M. and Larry Selinker. *Second Language Acquisition: an introductory course*, p. 53-63.

Learners avoid complex structures in the foreign language and choose simple or more transparent forms. This phenomenon is known as avoidance.⁹ This determines what structures a learner produces and which are not produced. The differences between the native language and the target language may be a source for avoidance; nonetheless, the complexities of the foreign language have been found to be a great source for this interlinguistic phenomenon. For instance, Spanish speakers learning English tend to avoid phrasal verbs and resort to those forms that are semantically more transparent (like the use of Latin-origin lexical items).

Samples of interlanguage analysis

A more detailed explanation of the information that learners' interlanguage analysis can reveal is provided through the following learner production samples:

The sample utterances were collected from oral and written output by beginners in the Foreign Language (English) Major at the Teacher Training University. The teacher analyzes the type of error, its source and tries to interpret its causes; this information will be useful in order to plan the appropriate strategy for remediation. The focus was on the use of personal pronoun forms, the use of articles and the infinitive verb forms.

- A)* *The national sport is **a** cricket*
- B) **The national tree is **a** blue mahoe*
- C) **It is situated in **a** south of Cuba*
- D) **...and **a** principal economic activities...*

This learner may have assumed that the indefinite article **a** can be used before any noun phrase, and he cannot distinguish between the use of definite and indefinite article; furthermore, he fails to distinguish the zero article use in A, when the noun phrase expresses a generic sense.

- E) **I'm is a student*
- F) **I'm study in a school*

This learner has internalized two words as a single word in her interlanguage; i.e., she has not decomposed *I + am*, and assumed it as a single-word personal pronoun.

- G) **I can **to** do many things*
- H) **I like-- watch TV*

⁹ Kleinmann, Howard H. Avoidance behavior in adult Second Language acquisition, p. 93-197.

I) **I don't like to feel **me** bad*

J) **I talk to people for know them better*

K) **I like to do **another** things*

This learner's inconsistency in the use of the infinitive form may be a reflection of the insecurity about the use of this form and she makes spontaneous and unconscious decisions. She adds the particle **to** in G) (ignoring its restriction after the modal verb) and misses it in H); however, she uses it properly in I) and K), but then introduces other deviations in these utterances: in I) because of the influence of Spanish she adds an indirect object to the verb *feel*, in K) there is no agreement between the determiner *another* and the plural form of the noun that follows it. The use of *another* before pluralized nouns seems to be a frequent deviation of beginners.

L) **My future job is important because -- prepare the students for **your** education*

M) *She teach **to** me*

N) **I help **to** my family*

*In these previous utterances one can notice the influence of the mother tongue, that is, transfer from the native language, or as preferred by other specialists, cross-linguistic influences.*¹⁰ Because of the lack of linguistic resources in the target language the learners have to make decisions on how to fill the gaps, or as an alternative, to simplify the target language structure. As the learner plans the utterance he/she departs from the Spanish pattern which is presumably simplified and then translated. This happens to beginners at the very elementary level. In item L) one can notice the pronoun omission before the verb *prepare*, because Spanish verbs express *person*, *but this does not happen in English*. Also, the learner has assumed that **your** stands for the Spanish possessive pronoun **su** and thus can be used instead of **her**, **his**, and **their** likewise. The use of the preposition **to** in M) and N) obeys to a Spanish syntactic pattern.

General remarks on interlanguage analysis

Through this analysis, the intention has been to illustrate the kind of study teachers may carry out which helps in several ways: it gives a partial picture of the learners' progress and difficulties; it helps to achieve a better understanding of the pupils' learning process and

¹⁰ Kellerman, Eric and Michael Sharwood Smith. Cross linguistic Influence in Second Language Acquisition, [s. p.]. Apud. Gass, Susan M. and Larry Selinker. Second Language Acquisition: an introductory course, p. 137-138.

learning strategies; it guides teachers on what content to focus, what input and what kind of remediation is required. In fact, teachers will have more control and regulation of their teaching and the students will profit from this.

Methodological procedures for a more efficient interlinguistic development

The main reason for IL analysis and remediation is to facilitate development and avoid fossilization in language learning or in particular aspects of language. Hence, it is convenient to turn to the aspect of teaching and remediation. The concern here is with teachers of English to be, who (unlike second language acquisition learners) are learning the language in a country where English is a foreign language. That is, they rarely have contact with native speakers if they ever do. It means they are more systematically exposed to foreign language users (Spanish speakers who are teachers of English as a FL) or to other interlanguages (in the interaction with peers), despite the use of native speaker audio-texts.

The following proposal of methodological procedures is intended to achieve a more efficient interlinguistic development of students in the pre-service English language teacher training course. They are the result of the systematization of the IL theory and the consideration of the role of the learners in creating an individual system. They are specially devised for foreign language teacher trainees:

- . Expose the students to sufficient native speaker input (either oral or written input). Sometimes the cause of deviations may be lack of sufficient input.
- . Use input intentionally to focus on selected language-specific information¹¹ (these are language items a learner views as unique or particular to the language and so require more analysis and practice than language-neutral forms or language universals).
- . Use techniques to make the learners react to such language-specific items; for example, if it is a syntactic form, verify if it is semantically transparent, make the students reflect on its structure, analyse it, compare it to the native language equivalent form and even to the IL form that they would produce in that situation, and discuss the probabilistic difficulties their prospective learners will have in trying to use this form.
- . Devote enough time to elicit **particular language-specific items** by using the appropriate elicitation technique (question and answer, interview, conversation, etc.)

¹¹ Kellerman, Eric and Michael Sharwood Smith. Cross linguistic Influence in Second Language Acquisition, [s. p.]. Apud. Gass, Susan M. and Larry Selinker. Second Language Acquisition: an introductory course, p. 147.

- . Give appropriate feedback through positive or negative evidence¹². That is, the former by the teacher's approval or model utterances; the latter through direct or indirect correction of the deviant utterances
- . Carry out reflection sessions on non-English like and English like constructions. Analyze the causes of deviations with the students
- . Make sure the students learn the necessary metalinguistic information that can be used as self-learning and teaching tools.
- . With senior students, reflect on the objective of each procedure so as to add to their professional-pedagogical competence.

Conclusions

Learning a foreign language is a complex multi-faceted process having an interdisciplinary character. In this process the individual learner has a crucial role in constructing a new system with the help of mediators, and this system is called *interlanguage (IL)*.

The integration of the theories of contrastive analysis and error analysis to interlanguage analysis becomes a valuable tool in the teacher's hands for understanding the process learners undergo, and make important decisions in the management of the process. It offers a different view on the errors the learner produces which obey to his/her unique self-created system. Interlanguage development undergoes different stages in the process of approaching the foreign language system.

The process of foreign language teacher training requires special attention and systematic interlanguage analysis. It should cover metalinguistic and interlinguistic analyses, reflection on differences and similarities, reflection on language-specific information and the teaching implications.

Interlanguage analysis suits the teachers in preparation with pedagogical tools to direct their teaching focus on the aspects that require learning, either for himself as a language learner or for his future practice. That is, there are items of language that require less attention than others. This can be revealed with more precision by this kind of analysis, which with the passing of years, and once an in-service teacher, will add a lot of experience to teachers' linguistic and methodological background. The methodological procedures proposed here are

¹² Gass, Susan M. and Larry Selinker. *Second Language Acquisition: an introductory course*, p. 329-340.

intended to contribute to this goal, especially through the discipline Integrated English Practice.

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